



MUSEO
SITIO DE MEMORIA
ESMA



HISTORIAS SIN OLVIDO

In the Officers' quarters where the Clandestine Detention Center of Torture and Extermination set up in the Naval Mechanics School operated. There were more than 700 places of illegal detention during the last dictatorship from 1976 to 1983.

Here, in the ESMA approximately 5000 men and women were detained or missing. They were members of political parties or social activists, revolutionary organizations either armed or unarmed, workers, trade union members, students, professionals, artists and members of religious orders. Most of them were dropped alive into the ocean.

Here, in the ESMA the Navy planned abductions and systematically carried out murders. Here, prisoners were kept in hoods and shackled. Here, they were tortured. Here, the Navy made them disappear.

Here, in the ESMA children were born in captivity and were separated from their mothers. Most of them were illegally adopted or robbed. We are still looking for many of them.

Here, in the ESM a crime against humanity was perpetrated.

**memory,
truth &
justice**

ESMA MUSEUM AND SITE OF MEMORY Former Clandestine Centre for Detention, Torture and Extermination

The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory will remain closed until further notice as a preemptive measure against the spread of Coronavirus in our country.

Contents not suitable for children under 12.

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Argentina **unida**

Secretaría de
Derechos Humanos



Ministerio de Justicia
y Derechos Humanos
Argentina

INHABITING IDENTITIES

BIOGRAPHIES WITH MEMORY



Picture: Mariano Armagno

Victoria Hilda Montenegro was born on January 31, 1976. She is the daughter of Hilda Ramona Torres –Chicha– and Roque Orlando Montenegro –Toti. Her parents came from the town of Metán in Salta. They were both members of ERP. In 1975, they moved to Boulogne, in the Buenos Aires province. On February 13, 1976, when Victoria was only thirteen days old, their home was raided in an operation led by colonel Herman Antonio Tetzlaff of the Army's 601 Intelligence Battalion. Her parents were killed in the operation. Tetzlaff left Victoria at the San Martín Police Precinct, and later, before she was six months old, she took her from there. He also took another baby boy in order to give him to his housemaid. The boy would later be identified as Horacio Pietragalla Corti. Victoria was registered as a biological daughter of Colonel Tetzlaff and his wife María del Carmen Eduarte.

In 1984, Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo received the first information about Victoria's abduction. In 1988, they filed a complaint for appropriation at the San Isidro federal court. The process was delayed as the couple who stole her constantly moved to a different home. Finally, the young woman took a DNA test and on July 5th, 2000 the results came in confirming she was the daughter of Hilda and Roque. In June 2001, the young woman reunited with her biological family.

The first time Victoria got to tell the full story about how she was stolen was in April 2011, during a hearing at the trial of the Systematic Plan to Steal Children. At the hearing, she laughed, and cried constantly. She was pulled from beneath her parents' dead bodies. Her ears were bleeding, her eardrums had burst.

— He told me that he had killed my parents —said Victoria at the trial—, that it was a war. That night he drank a lot. He said it a couple of times. He said that there were a lot of baby clothes. That he was the leader. Later, the women who stole me told me the rest.”

Victoria was able to reconstruct her story as time went by. She still keeps a letter from a friend of her parents, which helped her reconstruct the origins of her name and part of her time with them. Felipe was the nickname of her father, Toti.

“We occasionally lived together in the northern area of the Buenos Aires province, in a house in William Morris —her father's friend wrote— that was four or five blocks away from the station, I don't know if the house was theirs or not. The home was a prefabricated 2-bedroom house with a small kitchen. One day, we received a fellow activist from the leadership, our dear and remembered Tordo de Benedetti who would later be imprisoned and shot during the dictatorship, and we had to accommodate him for a few days. We assumed he was waiting for a mission (...). He was 27, 28 years old, we were in our early 20s, so we were fascinated by him. I particularly remember Felipe celebrating the stories and operations of the Tupas, who by that time were legends of the revolution in the continent”. “Mary was at a late stage of her pregnancy, and I remember how happy Felipe was. And since we were buddies because we were reunited after Tucumán it was always like reuniting with very dear brothers. I remember they were going to name you Victoria Hilda, Felipe told me”.

The Tetzlaffs lived in the apartment complex of Villa Lugano. The apartment was usually covered with flags. Some of their friends included Leopoldo Galtieri, Guillermo Suárez Mason and Omar Riveros. Tetzlaff was a heavy-set person, 6.5 feet tall and 320 pounds, blond like his wife, both German descendants. They had a biological daughter who was older than Victoria.

When Victoria was five or six years old, she broke a cup. She still keeps that memory. That is what she talked about in that hearing. María del Carmen scolded her. She told her she would return her to the nuns house. Tetzlaff said it was too late for that. Victoria, then, apologized. This time I'll forgive you and you get to stay home —her appropriator said.

Victoria grew up under the name María Sol Tetzlaff Eduartes. In that life they made up for her, she had been born on May 28th, 1976, a day before the celebration of Army Day. According to that story, on the 26th Tetzlaff had a military parade in San Isidro, that was when María del Carmen, who was pregnant, got sick and was taken to the Del Sol clinic, where the baby was born, and from where she got her name.

— ¿Do you have any memories of him during the dictatorship? —the prosecutor asked. And she started to go back in time, into Campo de Mayo, in a barbecue with Tetzlaff. It's summer.

“He would spend the summers with him. Or the holidays, I would go with him to the barracks and stay there. He would tell me about the operations. He sat down and ate barbecues every day. I sat on his right. He would describe the details of when they killed the subversives. And that they were surprised with the courage of the women, they didn't expect that.”

He used to say they had to give their lives for the cause. Victoria didn't understand what cause he was referring to.

“I don't know what the cause was exactly, but it was an Argentine flag; they were the good guys, there was a national cause; it was the smell of leather, the boots, the Christian family, going to mass, dining out because Mary didn't cook, that was family for me: packed restaurants and Herman finishing conversations with his 45 on the table:

— I'm always right —he said— Especially when I'm not.

The Revelation

Victoria believed that there had been a war in Argentina. That the colonel was her real father.

— ¿When did you start to have doubts? —the prosecutor asked.



Picture: Julián Athos

— When I was 9 years old —she said—. Herman got a call from a courthouse in Morón. I went there with him. I walked into the judge's office and he asked if it wasn't best that I wait outside. Herman said no. Then, the judge took a case file out of a drawer and told him the old women were already starting trouble.

Tezlaff knew several people in the courts. They would pass on information about the case to him. She believed what he told her: that somehow, the subversives were taking vengeance on the soldiers. She was convinced that the disappeared were a lie. That the Grandmothers damaged families. In 1988, the colonel told her that there was a *montonero* judge in San Isidro who was conducting an investigation.

— That the Grandmothers were in on it, and most likely they would draw a sample of my blood to compare it with the Genetic Bank, which was actually run by the Grandmothers. He told her that surely they would tell her that she was the daughter of subversives, that they would come to take her away from home.

Victoria took a first test that confirmed she wasn't the Tetzlaffs' daughter. When the court summoned her to provide a new blood sample, she refused. Finally, the San Martín Court of Appeals intervened, and she was expected by three judges.

— One who is subversive and *montonero* — her stealer told her— and two of our people.

The Court didn't accept her refusal to take a blood test, through a ruling that became a precedent in the case of Evelyn Vásquez and was later confirmed by the Supreme Court. That day, Tezlaff waited for her in a steakhouse. Victoria handed him the court ruling.

Finally, the court cross-referenced the data of her DNA with the National Bank of Genetic Data. On July 5th, 2000, they got a confirmation that she was the daughter of Hilda and Roque. Judge Marquovich gave her the news.

— The first thing I said was that in all those percentages there was a zero point zero one percent that allowed me to think maybe it wasn't so —she said at the trial—. I was terrified because I was the daughter of subversives, that was my first fear. I was the daughter of the enemy, I said. He won't love



Picture: Mariano Armagno

me anymore. I was convinced that in Herman's mind I had become the enemy .

Inhabitable Identities, Available Identities

María del Carmen Roqueta presided over the court in the trial for child theft. The prosecutor sat in front of the judges. As did the defendants. The hearings tried Jorge Rafael Videla, the first president of the Military Junta. There were other repressors as well. But Tezlaff wasn't in any of those chairs. He had died while in custody in Campo de Mayo.

The entrance hall at Victoria's home changed some time after the trial. Things were no longer there. Victoria took some of her pictures off the wall. The picture of colonel Tetzlaff holding two baby girls went from being on the center of a wall to a drawer in the closet. On the walls she hung pictures of her children, an image of Cristina Fernández and the only colored photo of her mother Hilda she was able to find.

Marlene Wayer, one of the top trans activists in Argentina, talks about "available identities" to explain what happens to them when they find something similar to a model, someone who enables a subjective element that is often experienced in an encapsulated and pathological way. Identity, she says, is a space that can be viewed as a boundary

that holds you down on a single place if we cannot hear ourselves and put our own identity into circulation as available for others, at least to see them as starting points for self-construction.

Wayar wrote these lines about the story Fernando Rodríguez wrote about himself. "My first 'I, Fernando' —he said— was a written 'Fernando': typing it and seeing it on a screen was like looking at myself in the mirror and finally liking myself, even if it was for just a couple of hours in a cybercafe. That was the first drop of the wave that would come later". That same reconstruction ability emerges in Victoria Montenegro's story, but also in each and everyone who went through their own paths of un-registering and reaffiliation. In some cases, because they come from the universe of stolen children, because those disaffiliations were literal, like amputations. In other cases, because they are the result of new filiations each one goes through, making choices over time.

Spaces of memory such as the Museum, but also the Trials for Crimes Against Humanity, set up scenes where stories emerge and open mirrored dialogues, invitations to those either sitting on the chairs or on the other side of the screens. Those who arrive and read can also find new ways of being engaged or enabled to find a new filiation.